

THE LITERARY LABORS

OF

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

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AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE THE AMERICAN  
PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY AT THE COMMEMORATION  
OF THE ONE HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE  
DECEASE OF ITS ILLUSTRIOUS FOUNDER AND FIRST  
PRESIDENT

APRIL 17, 1890

BY

G. BROWN GOODE

*Assistant Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution*

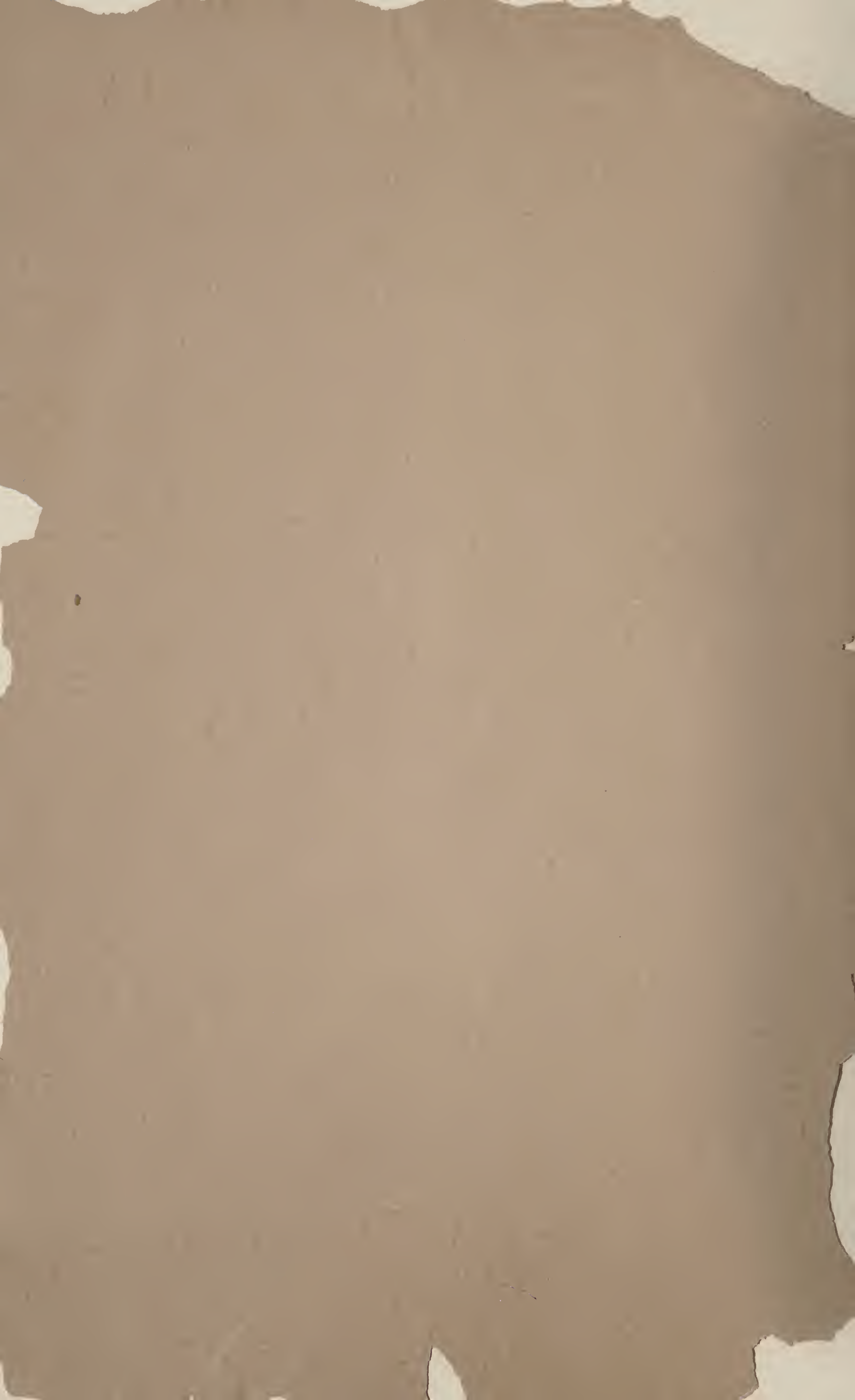
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FROM THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY  
VOL. XXVIII, 1809

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PHILADELPHIA

1890



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## THE LITERARY LABORS OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN.

BY G. BROWN GOODE, PH.D., LL.D.

When the New World sent Franklin to Europe, England and France received him, without question, as the equal of their own greatest men. Lavoisier, Turgot and Raynal, Buffon, Rousseau and Condorcet were his admirers, Gibbon, Hume, and Adam Smith, Kames, Robertson, Bentham and Priestly, his friends, while to the poet Cowper praise by him atoned for all the carpings of the critics.

When he first met Voltaire, in the hall of the French Academy of Sciences, the two old men saluted affectionately, amid the tears and the applause of the spectators, and it was proclaimed through Europe that Sophocles and Solon had embraced.

His colleague, John Adams, by no means the most ardent of his admirers, said of him :

“ His reputation was more universal than that of Leibnitz or Newton, Frederick the Great or Voltaire, and his character more beloved and esteemed than any or all of them. Newton had astonished, perhaps, forty or fifty men in Europe; for not more than that number, probably, at any one time had read him and understood him, and these being held in admiration in their respective countries, at the head of the philosophers, had spread among scientific people a mysterious wonder at the genius of this, perhaps the greatest man that ever lived. But *his* fame was confined to men of letters. The common people cared nothing about such a recluse philosopher. Leibnitz's name was still more confined. Frederick was hated by one-half Europeans much as Napoleon is. Voltaire was considered as a vain and profligate wit, and not esteemed by anybody, though admired by all who knew his works. But Franklin's fame was universal. His name was familiar to

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government and people; to kings, courtiers, nobility, clergy, and philosophers, as well as to plebeians, to such a degree that there was scarcely a peasant or a citizen, coachman or footman, a lady's chambermaid or a scullion in the kitchen who was not familiar with his name, and who did not consider him as a friend of human kind. When they spoke of him, they seemed to think he was to restore the golden age."

In a nation of three millions, he was first in every field of action, as printer, publisher, editor, and humorist—in political economy, administration and statesmanship, in science, philosophy, diplomacy, and in literature. He stands to-day a colossal figure in the world's memory, his popularity in no wise lessened by lapse of time, and Americans still wonder at his stature, seemingly unable to measure the extent of his greatness. In Europe he is still thought the first of Americans, the most perfect embodiment of the spirit and genius of his country, and its one great writer who lived before the days of Irving.

His easy-going freedom of speech, his liberal views on theological questions and his irreverence, coupled with a certain coarseness, almost Rabelaisian, in his early writings, have lessened his popularity among educated Americans. Then, too, the subjects of which he wrote—the current political issues, the manners and morals of every-day people, common abuses and how to do away with them, passing events and their lessons, household economies, and the like—although they gave him a great popular audience, were not of the kind best fitted to call forth the admiration of his literary contemporaries.

His choice of subjects was, nevertheless, the best evidence of his preëminence. "Great men are more distinguished by range and extent than by originality. A great man does not wake up on some fine morning and say, 'I am full of life, I

will go to sea, and find an Antarctic continent; to-day I will square the circle; I will ransack botany, and find a new food for man; I have a new architecture in my mind; I foresee a new mechanic power.' No; but he finds himself in the river of thoughts and events, forced onward by the ideas and necessities of his contemporaries. He stands where all the eyes of man look one way, and their hands all point in the direction in which he should go. The church has reared him amidst rites and pomps, and he carries out the advice which her music gave him, and builds a cathedral needed by her chants and processions. He finds a war raging; it educates him by trumpet, in barracks, and he betters the instruction. He finds two counties groping to bring coal, or flour, or fish, from the place of production to the place of consumption, and he hits on a railroad. Every master has found his materials collected, and his power lay in his sympathy with his people, and in his love of the materials he wrought in." \*

The spirit of the hour was Franklin's constant inspiration, and his writings were a legitimate result, the natural outgrowth of his activity in all matters of public concern. Admirable in themselves, their chief interest is nevertheless due to the fact that they form so complete a record of the deeds and the personal character of their author.

"Though he was a voluminous writer and one of the great masters of English expression, Franklin wrote habitually with a single eye to immediate practical results. He never posed for posterity. Of all the writings to which he mainly owes his present fame, it would be difficult to name one which he gave to the press himself or of which he saw the proof. Yet he never wrote a dull line nor many which the century of time has robbed of their interest or value. What-

\* Emerson.

ever he wrote seems to have been conceived upon a scale which embraced the whole human race, as well as the individual or class to whom it was specifically addressed, the one evidence of true greatness which never deceives nor misleads. If he wrote to his wife, it was, more or less, a letter from every husband to his wife; if to his daughter, it was a letter that any daughter would be pleased to receive from her father; if to a philosopher or statesman, there was always that in the manner or matter of it which time cannot stale, and which will be read by every statesman and philosopher with the sort of interest they would have felt had it been addressed personally to them." \*

The gathering of "Frankliniana" has become of late years a favorite pursuit of book lovers, and there are many excellent private collections besides the magnificent assemblages of his printed books, manuscripts and imprints in the public libraries of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington. The pioneer in this movement was Prof. Justin Winsor, who, in 1869, established a Franklin Alcove in the Boston Public Library, for the reason, as he said at the time, "that Franklin is to Boston what Shakespeare is to England."

A complete library of Frankliniana, including not only the books by him and about him, but also the products of his press, would embrace nearly two thousand separate units. Such a collection would possess a very great value in money. †

Several bibliographies of Franklin have been printed. One

\* Bigelow's Preface to Franklin's Works.

† One of his imprints, the translation of Cicero's "Cato Major," in good condition, has sold for \$200. A complete series of "Poor Richard" would be almost priceless. Of the twenty-six numbers, the Pennsylvania Historical Society had, when Ford's book was printed, only sixteen; the Lenox Library, seventeen; the Library Company of Philadelphia, twenty-one; the Congressional Library, thirteen; and the American Philosophical Society, one, which, however, is the first. Of the issues of 1734 and 1735 none are in the possession of any of these libraries.



of the most serviceable is that of Sparks in the latter part of his tenth volume. Another is the admirable one of Lindsay Swift, printed seven years ago by the Boston Public Library. The latest and fullest is the "Franklin Bibliography," of Paul Leicester Ford, a very stout octavo volume of nearly five hundred pages, which is intended mainly for the collector and is a minute and exhaustive catalogue of the variations of every possible bibliographical unit.

In this are cited nine hundred and ninety-seven titles, arranged as follows :

I. Books and pamphlets wholly or partly written by Franklin.	1-600
II. Periodicals and serials containing writings of Franklin....	601-618
III. State Papers and Treaties, in forming which Franklin aided.	619-633
IV. Works containing letters of Franklin.....	639-709
V. Pseudonyms used by Franklin. ....	710-784
Works relating to, written to, or dedicated to Franklin. ....	790-1002
In addition to these there are named in the accompanying Reference List other publications, relating in part to Frank- lin, to the number of.....	508

Of the six hundred titles given by Ford in his list of books wholly or partly written by Franklin, there are only about ninety which represent distinct efforts of authorship, even though prefaces, notes in books written by others, and broadsides be counted. The remaining titles relate to reprints, advertisements, and hypothetical publications of which no copies are known to exist.

Franklin's literary remains may be classified as follows :

1. The Autobiography—from 1706 to 1757.
2. Poor Richard's Almanac, in twenty-six annual issues, 1732-58, culminating in "Father Abraham's Speech at the Auction."
3. Essays upon Manners, Morals and the Science of Life, including the so-called Bagatelles, in all sixty titles or more.
4. Tracts and Papers upon Political Economy, Finance, and the Science of Government ; in all about forty titles.

5. Essays and Tracts, Historical and Political, concerning the American Revolution and the events which immediately preceded and followed—1747-1790.
6. Scientific Papers—from 1737-1790; in all 221 titles and nearly 900 pages, octavo.
7. Correspondence, Diplomatic, Domestic and Literary—1724-90; in all, some twelve hundred letters, while many still remain unpublished.

#### THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

The autobiography, prepared between the ages of sixty-five and eighty-three, is one of the most remarkable books ever written. It was intended for his son, and certain intimate friends, and was not published until after the death of its author, and was never printed as it had been written until a few years ago, when, in 1874, Mr. John Bigelow issued a correct version from the original manuscript, which by marvelous good fortune had fallen into his hands, while Minister at the Court of France.

The autobiography has passed through at least one hundred and seventy editions, and has been translated into German, French, Danish, and Spanish.

To understand it properly, the reader should use Bigelow's edition and none other—for its editor, with admirable skill, has supplemented Franklin's own narrative, complete in itself up to 1757, by a series of extracts from his letters and other writings, so that it is told in the philosopher's own words, and is complete almost to the day of his death.

During the twenty-eight years of his residence abroad, from 1758 to 1785, he was in constant correspondence with the governments he represented, and with his friends, who were numerous and to whom he wrote at length and with great freedom.

“To his protracted expatriation,” writes Bigelow, “we owe

this fact, that there is scarcely an important incident in Franklin's life which is not described by himself in his memoirs, or in his correspondence; and it is to this vast treasury of sterling English, which seems to have been almost miraculously preserved from incalculable perils by sea and by land, that the legion of his biographers have been indebted for what has most contributed to render their writing attractive.

"I am not aware that any other eminent man has left so complete a record of his own life. The part of which, from the nature of things, could not be preserved in correspondence—his youth and early manhood; his years of discipline and preparation—has been made as familiar as household words to at least three generations, in those imperishable pages which, in the full maturity of his faculties and experiences he prepared at the special instance of his friends, Le Veillard, Rochefoucault, and Vaughan. From the period when that fragment closes until his death, we have a continuous, I might almost say, a daily record of his life, his labors, his anxieties, and his triumphs, from his own pen, and written when all the incidents and emotions they awakened were most fresh and distinct in his mind.\*

#### THE ALMANAC.

Franklin's Almanac is interesting in itself, but far more so in its effects on the history of American letters and American life. It was the beginning of our American periodical literature, the first successful serial, the pioneer of the great army of magazines and reviews which, even now, stand in the place of public libraries to the great majority of our people.

Franklin's was not a monthly, or even a quarterly; it was an annual magazine of instructive and entertaining literature.

\* "Life," p. 6.

He was the most experienced of American journalists, the editor and principal contributor of the *New England Courant*, when, in 1723, it threw Boston into tumult, and, in 1729, founder of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, for more than half a century the leading newspaper in the New World. He fully appreciated the possibilities of periodical literature in America and established, in 1741, a monthly called "The General Magazine and Historical Chronicle for all the British Provinces in America," \* an effort which failed because the country was not yet ready.

The Almanac was to the people of that day, what the weeklies and monthlies have become to their great-grandchildren. Franklin began to print it in 1732, and it soon became a necessity in every household from New England to the Carolinas, and made the name of "Poor Richard" famous all over the world. Within twenty-five years, at least a quarter of a million copies of this treasury of homely wisdom had been distributed throughout the colonies.

Franklin wished that his Almanac should be a vehicle for conveying instruction among the common people, who bought scarcely any other books. He, therefore, filled all the little spaces between the remarkable days in the calendar with proverbial sentences, chiefly such as inculcated industry and frugality as the means of procuring wealth and thereby securing virtue; "it being," as he said, "more difficult for a man in want to act always honestly than it is hard for an empty sack to stand upright." Finally he brought together in a connected fabric, all the best of the sayings of Poor Richard for twenty-five years, in the form of the harangue of a wise old man to the people attending an auction. "Father Abraham's Speech," "The Way to Wealth," or "La Science du Bonhomme

\* Six numbers of this periodical were printed.

Richard," as this composition was variously called, touched by its simple wisdom, responsive chords in the hearts of all simple-minded people.

Its influence was amazingly great. No one was better able than Franklin to judge of its extent, no one less likely to exaggerate it.

Writing about it, in 1788, he said :

" The piece, being universally approved, was copied in all the newspapers of the continent; reprinted in Britain on broadsides, to be stuck up in houses; two translations were made of it in French, and great numbers bought by the clergy and gentry to distribute gratis among their poor parishioners and tenants. In Pennsylvania, as it discouraged useless expense in foreign superfluities, some thought it had its share in producing that growing plenty of money which was observable for several years after its publication." \*

Ford's bibliography shows that since it was written, one hundred and twenty-three years ago, "Father Abraham's Speech" has been reprinted about three times for each year. Seventy or more separate editions in English have appeared, fifty-six in French, eleven in German, and some in Italian. It was printed in Danish at Copenhagen (1801, 1820); in Catalan at Montroulez (1820) and Morlais (1832); in Greek in Paris (1823); in Dutch at The Hague (1828); in Portuguese in Paris (1828); in Bohemian at Teshen (1838); in Welsh in London (1839); in Spanish at Caracas in Venezuela (1858); in Russian at St. Petersburg (1809), and in Chinese at Peking (in 1884), as well as in Polish and the phonetic characters.

Ford is quite justified in saying that it has been oftener printed and translated than any other book from an American pen.

\* Autobiography, Bigelow edition, i, 250.

## THE ESSAYS.

Franklin's essays represented his most finished work. Among them indeed are the only compositions written with a distinctly artistic purpose. Many years after his death a small, thin portfolio was found among his papers. On its cover was written "BAGATELLES," and within were fifteen or more of his own favorite essays. These were prepared for the entertainment of that brilliant circle of friends in Paris, in whose meetings the venerable author took so much delight. Among them were many of his most graceful and witty productions—such as "The Morals of Chess," "The Dialogue between Franklin and the Gout" and "The Ephemera."

The Bagatelles were written when he was over seventy. In some of his satires, half a century earlier in date, as for instance "The Speech of Mistress Polly Baker," he exhibited equal force and skill, though a wit less mellow and refined and a style less polished through familiarity with French literature.

His essay writing began when he contributed to his brother's newspaper in Boston a series of satirical letters signed "Silence Dogood"—which are highly praised by those who have read them. "So well," says McMaster, "did the lad catch the spirit, the peculiar diction, the humor of his model, the *Spectator*, that he seems to have written with a copy of Addison open before him."

Seven years later he prepared for a Philadelphia newspaper, *The Mercury*, a series of essays under the title of "The Busy Body." This was his first effort in a strictly literary direction. Some admirer has described them as being written "after the manner of the *Spectator*, but more readable."

Although the critic of to-day may not fully agree with this judgment, he cannot fail to be pleased with the graceful, easy

flow of the words, and at the same time, interested in the evidences of the young printer's extensive and intelligent acquaintance with the best of English books.

After he became owner of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* he wrote for it essays in the same vein, many of which have been reprinted in recent editions of his writings.

Some of the essays were humorous or satirical, others related to religious and moral subjects and the economy of life, others still to the current events of the day. Among them was an admirable exposition of what was then known about earthquakes; and this, published in 1737, was his first contribution to scientific literature.

When he was living in England he constantly wrote for the press, and among his productions at this time were a number of papers, which although an essential part of his political writings, should also be included in that carefully-edited collection of Franklin's essays for which the world has been expectantly waiting for a hundred years. Among the best are the "Receipt for Diminishing a Great Empire," and the "Remarks Concerning the Savages of North America," written in Paris a few years later, which rank among the most brilliant of political satires.

#### HIS DOMESTIC AND LITERARY CORRESPONDENCE.

Franklin was the brightest and most charming of correspondents, and there is not one of his letters which is in the least degree dull or formal.

Over 1200 are printed by Bigelow, and they make up at least nine-tenths of the bulk of his literary remains. Many of them are little essays, and should be included in every edition of his short papers. In no connection are they more

readable than as arranged by Mr. Bigelow\* to form a part of the autobiography. "To be fully understood and appreciated," writes Bigelow, "they (as well as all the rest of his writings) should be read in chronological order and by the light of current events, for every one of them was as much the product of its time and circumstances as the fruits and flowers of a garden are of their respective seasons."

Though the signature is always "B. Franklin," the writer is sometimes the statesman, sometimes the shrewd, practical tradesman, sometimes the philosopher, sometimes the inventor concerned with mechanical details—now the philanthropist, now the wily diplomat, again the loving husband and parent, interested above all things in the affairs of his own little family, again the brilliant man of the world, gossiping with Madame Helvetius or the Abbé Morellet.

"His letters," said John Foster, "abound in tokens of benevolence, sparkling not unfrequently with satiric pleasantry, but of a bland, good-natured kind, arising in the most easy, natural manner, and thrown off with admirable simplicity and brevity of expression. There are short discussions relating to various arts and conveniences of life, plain instructions for persons deficient in cultivation, and the means for it; condolences on the death of friends, and frequent references, in an advanced stage of the correspondence, to his old age and approaching death. Moral principles and questions are sometimes considered and simplified; and American affairs are often brought in view, though not set forth in the diplomatic style."

It would seem impossible that the man who wrote at times so seriously and devoutly could have been also the author of the so-called "Suppressed Letters." Between the ages of fifteen

\* Bigelow's "Franklin," i, p. 21.



and eighty-five, however, a human character has time for many transformations.

TREATISES UPON POLITICAL ECONOMY.

At the age of twenty-three, in 1729, Franklin published his "Modest Enquiry into the Nature and Necessity of Paper Money"—perhaps the earliest treatise on finance and currency written in America.

This pamphlet was written at a time of public crisis, and for a definite purpose, which was successful. It was the first of a series of political essays, published from time to time in the sixty-two years of life which remained to its author—each with some useful end in view, and each without exception productive of some definite result.

Edmond Burke was wont to say that when Franklin appeared before the British Parliament, he was like "a master examined before a parcel of school-boys," and Charles Fox declared that the ministry on that occasion "were mere dwarfs in the hand of a master."

Persuasive and convincing as were his spoken words, the power of the man was even more evident when he took up his pen to write upon topics of public interest. His political papers, however, have little meaning at the present time except to students familiar with the history of the days to which they belong, though read in connection with the story of his life they have a very great interest of their own.

In 1751 appeared "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind and the Peopling of Countries"—to which it would appear that Adam Smith in later years was indebted for suggestions, and which led Malthus to write his great "Essay on Population."

Franklin wrote other useful treatises, "On the Laboring

Poor," on "The Principles of Trade," on "Luxury, Idleness and Industry," on war, privateering and the Court of the Peers, and many kindred topics. None of his economical treatises were so original or so influential as the two which were first written. The last in the list, however, "On the Slave Trade," although finished only twenty-four days before his death and at the age of eighty-five, is as full of vigor and fire as his best efforts of a quarter of a century previous. It contains the speech of Mehemet Ibrahim in the Divan of Algiers, which Lord Jeffrey declared was not surpassed by any of the pleasantries of Arbuthnot or Swift.

#### POLITICAL WRITINGS.

Franklin's first political treatise was written in 1747.

The war between Great Britain and France, which was at that time in progress, was thought to have brought the American colonies into great danger, and the governor of Pennsylvania anxiously labored to prevail upon the Quaker Assembly to pass a militia law and to make other provisions for the security of the province. To further this project, Franklin wrote and published a pamphlet, entitled "Plain Truth," which had a sudden and surprising effect, and resulted in a few weeks in the organization of a colonial militia of over ten thousand men. This was the beginning of the conversion of the inhabitants of Pennsylvania from the Quaker doctrine of submission to that of defensive warfare, and had a most important influence upon the future of America.\*

\*Bigelow says of this pamphlet:

"Substituting the words 'United States' for Pennsylvania, it is as timely to-day as when it was written. Though we are at peace with all nations, we have many times as many lives and many times as much property exposed, while our defenses are relatively inferior to those which Franklin denounced nearly a century and a half ago as unpar-donably deficient" (Bigelow's "Franklin," Vol. ii, p. 39).

“Plain Truth” was followed by several other tracts in relation to the struggle between Pennsylvania and the Proprietary Government in the hands of the Penn family. The most influential was that called “Cool Thoughts on the Present Situation of our Public Affairs,” printed in 1764, which was a masterly argument in favor of a change from Proprietary to a Royal Government.

During his residence in England before the Revolution, and in France during its continuance and afterwards, Franklin wrote much. One of the most important of his early papers was that printed in London in 1760, entitled “The Interest of Great Britain in Regard to Her Colonies,” a protest against the proposal that Great Britain should give up Canada to the French, and receive instead the Island of Guadaloupe in the West Indies.

So strong a paper was this that Burke, in replying to it, said of its author: “He is clearly the ablest, the most ingenuous, and the most dexterous of those who have written upon the question, and we may therefore conclude that he has said everything in the best manner that the case would bear.”

These, however, together with his more extensive treatises upon the condition of affairs in the new Republic, belong to the statesman Franklin, rather than to Franklin the man of letters. Together with his diplomatic correspondence they make up fully half of his published works.

#### SCIENTIFIC WRITINGS.

Franklin’s scientific writings were voluminous. Sparks reprinted 63 papers on electricity, filling 302 pages, and 157 on philosophical subjects, making 578 pages—in all 220 letters and 880 pages—which is a remarkable showing for a man so constantly occupied with private and public business.

His scientific papers are written in a style peculiar to their author—lucid, convincing, never wearisome. “A singular felicity of induction guided all his researches, and by very small means he established very grand truths. The style and manner of his publications on electricity are almost as worthy of admiration as the doctrine they contain. He has endeavored to remove all mystery and obscurity from the subject. He has written equally for the uninitiated and for the philosopher; and he has rendered his details amusing and perspicuous, elegant as well as simple. Science appears, in his language, in a dress wonderfully decorous, best adapted to display her native loveliness. He has in no instance exhibited that false dignity by which philosophy is kept aloof from common applications; and he has sought rather to make her a useful inmate and servant in the common habitations of man, than to preserve her merely as an object of admiration in temples and palaces.” \*

Perhaps the most judicious estimate of Franklin’s qualities as a man of letters is that by John Foster in the *Eclectic Review* for 1818.

“It is unnecessary to remark,” he writes, “that Franklin was not so much a man of books as of affairs; but he was not the less for that a speculative man. Every concern became an intellectual subject to a mind so acutely and perpetually attentive to the relation of cause and effect. For enlargement of his sphere of speculation, his deficiency of literature, in the usual sense of the term, was excellently compensated by so wide an acquaintance with the world and with distinguished individuals of all ranks, professions and attainments. It may be, however, that a more bookish and contemplative employment of some portion of his life would have left one deficiency of his mental character less palpable. There appears

\* Sir Humphrey Davy.

to have been but little in that character of the element of sublimity. We do not meet with many bright elevations of thought, or powerful, enchanting impulses of sentiment, or brilliant, transient glimpses of ideal worlds. Strong, independent, comprehensive, never remitting intelligence, proceeding on the plain ground of things, and acting in a manner always equal to, and never appearing at moments to surpass itself, constituted his mental power. In its operation it has no risings and fallings, no disturbance into eloquence or poetry, no cloudiness of smoke indeed, but no darting flames. A consequence of this perfect uniformity is, that all subjects treated appear to be on a level, the loftiest and most insignificant being commented on in the same unalterable strain of calm, plain sense, which brings all things to its own standard, inso-much that a great subject shall sometimes seem to become less while it is elucidated and less commanding while it is enforced. In discoursing of serious subjects, Franklin imposes gravity on the reader, but does not excite solemnity, and on grand ones he never displays or inspires enthusiasm."

Although his works fill ten stately volumes, Franklin never wrote a book for publication.

The "Autobiography" was intended solely for the pleasure of his intimate friends. The sayings of Poor Richard were prepared for his yearly *Almanac*, with purely utilitarian ends in view. His scientific discoveries were announced, with few exceptions, in letters to his friends, who printed them without his knowledge or consent.

His political papers appeared in the newspapers and reviews, in letters, or prefaces, and in occasional pamphlets. Some of his brightest and most finished essays were set up and printed by his own hand, as broadsides, on a little printing-press which he had in his apartments while Minister to France.

✓ The matter-of-fact character of his early writings was largely due to his surroundings and to the people for whom he wrote. When at leisure in the society of cultivated people he soon yielded to their influence. His famous essay on the "Way to Wealth," for example, was written soon after his visit to Virginia and a somewhat intimate association with General Braddock and his staff. The first, and incomparably the best, part of his "Autobiography" was written at the time of his most intimate connection with English literary society and while visiting at the country home of the Bishop of St. Asaph. The witty Bagatelles were produced in the midst of a brilliant Parisian circle.

✓ His contributions to science were the result of a period of voluntary seclusion and temporary respite from business cares which he had learned by his frugality and industry while printer and publisher.

✓ After he had acquired literary fame, he made use of it to promote the welfare of his country. A French writer, describing, in 1872, the events of nearly a century before, said :

"The coming of the famous American to Paris caused a profound sensation. Everybody wanted to see the author of the 'Almanach du Bonhomme Richard;' his mind was compared to that of Cato, and his character to that of Socrates. Franklin knew full well how to take advantage of the impression which he had produced upon a nation so impressionable as were the French, always ready to place their lives and their wealth at the service of a noble principle, and, following the example of Lacretelle, he decided to serve as ambassador not to a court but to a free and generous people."

✓ He was by instinct a scholar and by inclination an author.  
 ✓ He loved books for themselves. He became a vegetarian at the age of sixteen that he might buy them.

Some one has called attention to his "remarkable affinity for superior people." His affinity for the best of books was also remarkable, and no one was ever more sensitive to their influence. In the "Autobiography" he mentions the books which, as a boy, he liked to read, and it is easy to trace the effects of each upon his subsequent life.

His literary style, though founded principally upon a thorough study of the *Spectator*, gave evidence at a very early day, of intimate acquaintance with Bunyan, Defoe, Plutarch, Rabelais and Xenophon. His philanthropic tendencies were shaped and strengthened by Cotton Mather's "Essays to do Good," and his administrative faculties by Defoe's "Essay upon Projects." Shaftesbury and Collins strongly influenced his theological opinions. Locke's "Essay on the Human Understanding" moulded his habits of thought, as did also the "Memorabilia" of Xenophon.

Franklin has been called the founder of modern utilitarianism, but it is unjust and ungenerous to place this estimate upon his character. He knew the world in which he lived, and the people for whom he wrote. His aim was to produce immediate and practical results. His precepts were written for the unthinking, the inexperienced and the selfish. Poor Richard was a kindergarten teacher.

In his advice in regard to the treatment of the aged, for example, he reminded his readers that they would themselves in their own last years need care and indulgence, but he also first appealed to motives the loftiest and tenderest. Whoever studies Franklin in a generous spirit, will find no lack of generous thought and principle.)

Like Socrates, Franklin estimated the value of every action by its utility. Moral utility was to him, however, the highest test of value. He believed that the promotion of universal

happiness, by the prevention or mitigation of evil, was man's highest function. "He seems," says Weems, "to have been all eye, all ear, all touch, to every thing that affected human happiness," and he died with his eyes fixed upon "the picture of Him who came into the world to teach men to love one another. On his death-bed he often returned thanks to God for having so kindly cast his lot of life in the very time of all others when he would have chosen to live for the great purposes of usefulness and pleasure."

Is there in history a more touching memory than that of Franklin awaiting the coming of death, the venerable sage, the pride and glory of his own land, the admiration of Europe, making excuses for the moanings which were occasionally forced from him by the severity of his pains—afraid that he did not bear them as he ought, while he observed his grateful sense of the many blessings he had received from the Supreme Being, who had raised him from small and low beginnings to such high rank and consideration among men.

I have already said that nothing was further from his thoughts than to obtain for himself literary fame. He took no care of his own writings, and made no effort to secure the publication of them. And still, a century after his death, he stands prominently forth as the only great literary man of America in colonial days and in the first fifty years of the Republic.

No one who has held in his hand a copy of Franklin's edition of Cicero's "Cato Major" can doubt that the man who made it had the soul of an artist. No one who has read his tender and exquisitely graceful preface to this beautiful edition can question that he had the heart of a poet, and the touch of a master of letters.

When twenty-five he founded a great public library, the earliest in America, that others as well as he might enjoy the companionship of books.



Books were always in his mind and by his side. He compared his own life to a book. At the age of eighty-three he wrote:

“Hitherto this long life has been tolerably happy; so that, if I were allowed to live it over again, I should make no objection, only wishing for leave to do, what others do in a second edition of their works—correct some of my *errata*.”

His “Autobiography,” written in the same spirit, noted the “errata” in its author’s career with true printer’s interest, as if he were scanning a bundle of proof sheets. He did not conceal them, but marked them so that all could see, frankly confessed his errors, and did what he could in atonement.

Jefferson desired that his monument should declare that he was the author of the Declaration of Independence and the founder of a great university. Franklin, in his will, sought no higher title than that of *printer*. A maker of books he had been for three-quarters of a century, and a friend and lover of literature even longer. The epitaph, written by his own hand for his tomb, which can never become trite by repetition, is full of the spirit of the great printer.

“THE BODY  
OF  
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN,  
PRINTER,  
(LIKE THE COVER OF AN OLD BOOK,  
ITS CONTENTS TORN OUT,  
AND STRIPT OF ITS LETTERING AND GILDING,)  
LIES HERE FOOD FOR WORMS,  
YET THE WORK ITSELF SHALL NOT BE LOST,  
FOR IT WILL, AS HE BELIEVED, APPEAR ONCE MORE,  
IN A NEW  
AND MORE BEAUTIFUL EDITION,  
CORRECTED AND AMENDED  
BY  
THE AUTHOR.”





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